

Vietnam: Another Look by Skip Nelson

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Skip Nelson's *Vietnam: Another Look* (White Lotus, 100 pp., \$69.99, hardcover; \$54.99, paper; \$9.99, e book) is a classic travel photo book, except that it welcomes Vietnam veterans back to a country they never knew. Peacetime Vietnam, as viewed through Nelson's lens, is lovely and gracious — not at all the hell so many veterans remember.

“Friendly faces and gentle natures are everywhere,” Nelson writes. There are no sad people in these pages, no one crushed by poverty or neglect, no mourners, no spurned lovers. The colors are lush and saturated—vibrant reds, rich blues, and warm yellows—as befits a semitropical culture, although one that was seldom displayed to Americans during the war.

In fact, as Nelson clearly shows, there was a lot that America's GIs didn't have time to admire: gilded temples, underground river grottoes, delightfully fresh food, the Cham ruins in Quy Nhon. Both as treat and travel invitation, he has lovingly documented the people and places of Vietnam.

Nelson also includes a good number of photos from Hanoi, which will be a pleasant surprise for most Americans.

Nelson's affection for Vietnam and its people is apparent. That's the book's greatest strength: It's pushed him to look longer and harder at this former enemy. But it's also the book's one shortcoming: Looking through a lover's eyes, he's all but blind to its faults. Vietnam is a vibrant, interesting country, but it is certainly no idyll.

Nonetheless, Skip Nelson documents a society eager to plunge into the 21st century while remaining firmly rooted in a strong, traditional culture. It's striking, too, that the French presence is still here in graceful, European residences, opera houses, and French-influenced cuisine. The French were a colonial power, of course, and they were there much longer than the Americans were. What remains of the American presence? Hardly a trace.



Nelson has assembled a beautiful collection of photographs in *Vietnam: Another Look*. Veterans owe it to themselves to give it a careful look—if only to see perhaps for the first time the country that profoundly altered their own lives.

The author's website is www.vietnamanotherlook.com

—Michael Keating

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